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ПРОБЛЕМЫ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ НАУКИ
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**PAN-IDEOLOGICAL COMPETITION IN CENTRAL ASIA:
A STRATEGIC SPACE CONSTRUCTED BY TURKEY, RUSSIA, AND CHINA**

Abstract

This article critically analyzes the process through which Central Asia has transformed into a strategic and ideational hub in the context of the post-Cold War reconfiguration of Eurasia. It explores the competition between the civilizational projects of Russia, China, and Turkey, illustrating how these ideological frameworks engage in a struggle to define the moral and spatial foundations of regional order. The authors argue that the emerging Eurasian order is not merely the result of material rivalry, but is shaped through pan-ideological contestation – a clash of values and spatial representations. Russia’s Eurasianist ideology seeks unity through hierarchical civilization, China’s Sinocentric development model promotes harmony through connectivity, and Turkey’s Pan-Turkic and Neo-Ottoman revivalism aims to establish fraternity through cultural and linguistic kinship. These three distinct ideological frameworks are institutionalized through international organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Organization of Turkic States, while being materialized through infrastructure projects like energy pipelines, transport corridors, and digital connectivity networks. The article proposes a three-layered conceptual model that integrates ideational, institutional, and infrastructural dimensions. This model examines how abstract civilizational discourses are translated into political and spatial realities through processes of discursive translation, institutional diffusion, and infrastructural embedding. The analysis demonstrates that Central Asian states are not passive recipients of external influence; rather, they exhibit strategic agency through multi-vector diplomacy and adaptive sovereignty, playing a pivotal role in shaping the region’s relational order.

The study concludes that the interaction among these pan-ideological frameworks leads to the rise of civilizational pluralism in Eurasia. Central Asia thus emerges as an ideational crossroads and a laboratory for post-Western order, where competing moral, cultural, and spatial logics intersect, contributing to a redefinition of the global geopolitical structure.

Keywords: Central Asia; Eurasianism; Belt and Road Initiative; Pan-Turkism; Critical Geopolitics; Civilizational Pluralism; Strategic Space

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ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯ ҮШІН ПАНИДЕОЛОГИЯЛЫҚ КҮРЕС ШЕҢБЕРІНДЕ ТҮРКИЯ, РЕСЕЙ ЖӘНЕ ҚЫТАЙ ҚАЛЫПТАСТЫРЫП ОТЫРҒАН СТРАТЕГИЯЛЫҚ КЕҢІСТІК

Аңдатпа

Бұл зерттеу жұмысы Қырғи-қабақ соғыстан кейінгі Еуразияның қайта құрылымдануы контекстінде Орталық Азияның стратегиялық және идеялық орталыққа айналу процесін терең ғылыми талдайды. Ресей, Қытай және Түркияның өркениеттік жобаларының бәсекелестігі аймақтық тәртіптің моральдық және кеңістіктік негіздерін анықтау жолындағы күресті көрсетеді. Авторлар Еуразиялық тәртіптің материалдық бәсекелестіктің нәтижесі емес, пан-идеологиялық тартыстың – құндылықтар мен кеңістіктік бейнелердің қақтығысы арқылы құрылатынын дәлелдейді. Ресейдің еуразияшылдық идеологиясы иерархиялық өркениет арқылы бірлікті қамтамасыз етуді көздейді, Қытайдың синоорталықтық даму моделі үйлесімділік пен байланыстылықты насихаттайды, ал Түркияның пан-түркілік және неосмандық жаңғыруы мәдени және тілдік туыстық арқылы бауырластықты орнықтыруды мақсат етеді. Бұл үш түрлі идеялық құрылымдар Еуразиялық экономикалық одақ, Шанхай ынтымақтастық ұйымы, және Түркі мемлекеттері ұйымы сияқты халықаралық ұйымдар арқылы институционалланады, әрі энергия құбырлары, көлік дәліздері, және цифрлық байланыс жобалары арқылы материалданады. Мақалада ұсынылған үшқабатты тұжырымдамалық модель идеялық, институционалдық және инфрақұрылымдық өлшемдерді біріктіреді. Бұл модель абстрактілі өркениеттік дискурстардың саяси және кеңістіктік шындықтарға айналу процесін – дискурстық аударма, институционалдық диффузия, және инфрақұрылымдық бекіту үдерістерін зерттейді. Орталық Азия мемлекеттері сыртқы ықпалға пассивті қабылдаушы емес, керісінше көпвекторлы дипломатия мен бейімделмелі егемендік арқылы стратегиялық агенттік танытады, бұл аймақтың реляциялық тәртібін қалыптастыруда маңызды рөл атқарады. Зерттеу нәтижесінде, пан-идеологиялық шеңберлердің өзара ықпалы Еуразиядағы өркениеттік плюрализмнің күшеюіне әкелетінін анықтайды. Орталық Азия бәсекелес моральдық, мәдени және кеңістіктік логикалар тоғысып, жаһандық геосаясат құрылымын қайта айқындайтын постбатыстық тәртіптің идеялық торабына айналады.

Түйін сөздер: Орталық Азия; еуразияшылдық; «Белдеу және жол» бастамасы; пан-түркізм; сыни геосаясат; өркениеттік плюрализм; стратегиялық кеңістік

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ПАНИДЕОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ БОРЬБА ЗА ЦЕНТРАЛЬНУЮ АЗИЮ: СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОЕ ПРОСТРАНСТВО, ВЫСТРАИВАЕМОЕ ТУРЦИЕЙ, РОССИЕЙ И КИТАЕМ

Аннотация

В статье предпринимается критический анализ процесса, в результате которого Центральная Азия трансформировалась в стратегический и идейный узел в условиях постбиополярной реконфигурации Евразии. Особое внимание уделяется соперничеству цивилизационных

проектов России, Китая и Турции; показано, каким образом данные идеологические рамки вовлечены в борьбу за определение моральных и пространственных оснований регионального порядка. Авторы исходят из того, что формирующийся евразийский порядок представляет собой не только результат материального соперничества, но и продукт панидеологической конкуренции, то есть столкновения ценностей, норм и пространственных репрезентаций. Евразийская идеология России ориентирована на достижение единства через иерархически организованную цивилизационную общность; синоцентричная модель развития Китая продвигает гармонию через связанность и взаимозависимость; пантюркизм и неоосманский ревизионизм Турции нацелены на утверждение братства на основе культурно-языковой близости. Эти три идеологические рамки институционализируются посредством таких международных организаций, как Евразийский экономический союз, Шанхайская организация сотрудничества и Организация тюркских государств, а также материализуются в инфраструктурных проектах, включая энергетические трубопроводы, транспортные коридоры и сети цифровой связанности. В статье предлагается трёхуровневая концептуальная модель, объединяющая идейное, институциональное и инфраструктурное измерения. Данная модель позволяет проследить, каким образом абстрактные цивилизационные дискурсы преобразуются в политические и пространственные реальности через процессы дискурсивной трансляции, институциональной диффузии и инфраструктурного закрепления. Проведённый анализ показывает, что государства Центральной Азии не выступают пассивными реципиентами внешнего влияния; напротив, они демонстрируют стратегическую субъектность посредством многовекторной дипломатии и адаптивного суверенитета, играя ключевую роль в формировании реляционного порядка региона.

В заключение обосновывается вывод о том, что взаимодействие указанных панидеологических рамок способствует усилению цивилизационного плюрализма в Евразии. Тем самым Центральная Азия предстает как идейный перекрёсток и своеобразная лаборатория постзападного порядка, в которой пересекаются конкурирующие моральные, культурные и пространственные логики, способствуя переопределению глобальной геополитической структуры.

Ключевые слова: Центральная Азия; евразийство; Инициатива «Пояс и путь»; пантюркизм; критическая геополитика; цивилизационный плюрализм; стратегическое пространство.

INTRODUCTION

The reconfiguration of Eurasia after the Cold War constitutes one of the most significant philosophical and geopolitical transformations in the modern international system. At the center of this transformation lies Central Asia, historically a crossroads and civilizational corridor linking empires, ideologies, and trade routes. In the twenty first century, the region has emerged as a contested symbolic space in which three intersecting ideological currents, namely Russian Eurasianism, Chinese Sinocentric developmentalism, and Turkish Neo Ottoman and Pan Turkic revivalism, compete to shape the normative foundations of regional order [1]. This contest involves not only material influence but also the ontological construction of strategic space and political legitimacy.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eurasia reemerged as both a geopolitical and philosophical landscape in which competing civilizational ideologies articulated new visions of order and belonging. For Russia, Eurasia signifies a civilizational reassertion rooted in the Eurasianist tradition, first formulated in the 1920s as an alternative to Western liberalism and Slavic nationalism. Classical thinkers such as Trubetzkoy and Savitsky portrayed Russia as a cultural mediator between Europe and Asia, endowed with a historical mission to preserve cultural plurality within imperial unity. In its contemporary form, Neo Eurasianism, advanced by Aleksandr Dugin, seeks to restore Russia's moral and geopolitical centrality through a multipolar order that resists Western universalism. Russian Eurasianism thus combines historical nostalgia with strategic ambition and interprets geography as destiny [2; 3; 4; 5].

For China, Central Asia represents the western frontier of its Sinocentric worldview, grounded in harmony, hierarchy, and the moral order of Tianxia, meaning “All Under Heaven”. Under Xi Jinping, this worldview has been institutionalized through the Community of Common Destiny for Mankind and the Belt and Road Initiative, both of which connect economic integration to civilizational renewal [6; 7]. China presents connectivity as both a material and a moral process. Infrastructure, including railways, pipelines, and digital corridors, embodies a moral geography in which harmony substitutes for hegemony. In this way, Chinese strategy transforms discourse into infrastructure, extending domestic governance philosophy into regional space. Central Asia therefore becomes not merely a sphere of influence but also a testing ground for Sinocentric order making.

Turkey’s Eurasian turn draws on a hybrid intellectual lineage that brings together Pan Turkism, Neo Ottomanism, and Eurasianism. In the early post-Cold War period, Ankara envisioned Eurasia as a Turkic revivalist project aimed at reconnecting the post-Soviet republics. Under the Justice and Development Party, this vision evolved into a more pragmatic and multidimensional framework. Turkey now presents itself as both an Islamic and secular power connecting Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Turkish Eurasianism, shaped by figures such as Doğu Perinçek and Attila İlhan, rejects Westernization in favor of a plural conception of sovereignty grounded in cultural autonomy and continuity with Ottoman statecraft. Although it occasionally converges with Russian interests, it places greater emphasis on kinship and solidarity with Turkic Central Asia [8; 9; 10].

Central Asia thus emerges as a polyvalent arena in which competing ideological architectures intersect. The region functions simultaneously as an object and a subject of geopolitics. The policies of Russia, China, and Turkey reflect not only strategic expansion but also civilizational projection, translating ideas of order, justice, and destiny into institutional and infrastructural forms. Yet, as Odgaard, Sim and Aminjonov observe, Central Asian states are not passive recipients of external influence [11; 12]. Through hedging, multi vector diplomacy, and selective adaptation, they preserve sovereignty and balance among external powers, cultivating a distinct form of relational sovereignty based on equilibrium rather than alignment.

The contest among the three ideological systems of Eurasianism, Pan Turkism, and the Community of Common Destiny extends beyond conventional geopolitical rivalry. It constitutes an epistemic struggle over how the post Western world conceptualizes civilization, order, and power. Each ideology advances a distinct moral ontology of space. Russian Eurasianism envisions hierarchy through unity, Chinese Sinocentrism promotes harmony through connectivity, and Turkish Pan Turkism aspires to fraternity through cultural and linguistic kinship [13;14]. Taken together, these ideologies transform geopolitics from a contest over dominance into a broader inquiry into the metaphysics of coexistence.

Although a substantial body of scholarship has examined the foreign policies and regional strategies of Russia, China, and Turkey, much of this literature remains state centric and materially oriented. Existing studies often isolate each ideology within its national context or treat these frameworks as separate geopolitical doctrines rather than as interrelated civilizational projects. Consequently, their mutual interaction within a shared regional arena remains insufficiently explored. The conceptual gap lies in the absence of an integrated framework capable of explaining how Central Asia functions as a common site of ontological contestation, where multiple visions of order and legitimacy converge. This study addresses that gap by interpreting Central Asia not simply as a recipient of great power influence but as a philosophical and geopolitical interface through which distinct civilizational narratives are mediated and contested.

To address this problem, the study adopts an interpretive framework that combines critical geopolitics, civilizational analysis, and constructivist international relations theory. Critical geopolitics provides the tools to deconstruct spatial narratives and reveal how geography is produced through discourse and power [13; 15; 16; 17]. Civilizational analysis clarifies the role of cultural and historical imaginaries in legitimizing political projects and reconstituting international order. Constructivism emphasizes the socially constructed character of identity and order, thereby enabling an analysis of how states and ideologies co produce meaning [18; 19; 20]. This conceptual orientation

situates the study within interpretive international theory, where ideology is understood not as a static system of belief but as a spatial and moral practice manifested through discourse, infrastructure, and diplomacy.

This study pursues three interrelated objectives that define its central analytical focus. First, it examines how Russian, Chinese, and Turkish intellectual and policy traditions conceptualize Eurasia as both a civilizational and geopolitical space. Through this analysis, the study seeks to uncover how each state constructs its moral and spatial vision of order and legitimacy. Second, it investigates how Central Asian states respond to and reinterpret these competing ideological projections through strategies of adaptation, hedging, and multi vector diplomacy. This dimension underscores the agency of Central Asian actors in navigating complex external pressures while preserving autonomy. Third, it assesses how the interaction among Russian, Chinese, and Turkish ideological frameworks contributes to the emergence of a plural and relational regional order in Eurasia.

In line with these objectives, the study is guided by several overarching research questions. It asks how Russia, China, and Turkey articulate their respective visions of Eurasian order and what normative assumptions underpin those visions. It further examines how Central Asian states exercise agency within and across these competing civilizational frameworks and how their diplomatic practices shape the broader configuration of regional power. Finally, it considers what form of political and normative order emerging from the intersection of these ideologies and how this evolving landscape reflects wider transformations in the post Western international system.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked a major epistemic and geopolitical transformation in Eurasia, turning the region into a dynamic discursive arena in which competing powers sought to redefine civilization, order, and identity. Scholars broadly agree that post-Soviet Eurasia has become a strategic and ideational crossroads, where Russia, China, and Turkey have positioned themselves not only as geopolitical powers but also as cultural and philosophical extensions of their respective civilizational narratives. In this context, Eurasia has emerged as both a geopolitical battleground and a philosophical space, where power is exercised as much through ideas as through institutions and infrastructure.

Russia's post-Soviet regional policy combines institutional integration with civilizational ideology. A. Matveeva interprets Moscow's "return to the Heartland" as a pragmatic attempt to reclaim regional influence through security cooperation and energy diplomacy [21]. However, E. Kropatcheva [22] and J. Šćepanović [23] conceptualize Russia's strategy as a form of cooperative hegemony institutionalized through structures such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). These mechanisms help formalize dependence while preserving multilateral legitimacy. Despite economic competition from China, Russia's influence persists not through economic leverage but through narrative control, particularly by portraying itself as the guarantor of regional order. Suslov's work traces the evolution of the "Russian World" concept from an inclusive cultural diaspora idea into a territorialized and irredentist ideology that legitimizes Russia's geopolitical expansion under the banner of moral exceptionalism [24]. The conceptualization of "Greater Eurasia" substitutes for the failed ideal of Greater Europe, promoting a post liberal vision grounded in multipolarity [25]. Russia's ideas thus evolve from pragmatic regionalism into an ideational project aimed at restoring the country's moral and geopolitical centrality in a post Western order.

China's approach to Central Asia presents an alternative mode of regional influence in which connectivity is privileged over coercion. J. Reeves conceptualizes the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) as a relational framework of power, where networks of infrastructure, trade, and communication serve as conducive forms of political influence [26]. This model contrasts sharply with Russia's hierarchical vision. Gabuev discusses the tensions within Sino Russian relations, describing their interaction as "managed rivalry," particularly when Belt and Road ambitions were not fully aligned with Russia's Eurasian Economic Union [27]. China's Sinocentric developmentalism constitutes a technocratic moral order that reimagines globalization through infrastructural integration and relational dependence rather than through direct political domination. Regional connectivity

through initiatives such as the Belt and Road has become central to China's strategy in Central Asia, yet institutional asymmetry remains a defining feature of its relations with both Russia and the Central Asian states [28]. While Beijing seeks bilateral partnerships, Moscow remains invested in preserving hierarchical control through multilateral institutions, thereby contributing to the persistence of institutional asymmetry in Central Asia.

Turkey's Eurasian policy reflects a hybrid synthesis of civilizational nostalgia and pragmatic engagement. Initially, the idea of a Turkic renaissance stretching from the Adriatic to the Great Wall captured Turkish ambitions, but geopolitical realities and limited economic resources soon tempered this vision. Ankara's evolving approach has increasingly taken the form of a civilizational foreign policy, in which identity and historical memory function as instruments of soft power rather than as mere extensions of state interest [1; 10; 29]. Under the Justice and Development Party, Turkey's strategy coalesced into an ideological framework blending Neo Ottomanism, Pan Turkism, and Eurasianism [30]. While Turkey's multi vector diplomacy emphasizes its role as both an Islamic and secular power connecting East and West, recent analyses highlight structural limitations in Turkish activism, especially after the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war [31]. Although Turkish influence is growing, it remains constrained by economic fragility and institutional limitations. This context situates Turkey's active soft power projection within historical and cultural spheres, in contrast to the more material and geopolitical approaches of Russia and China.

At the intersection of these ideologies, Central Asia operates as an epistemic battleground where competing visions of sovereignty and legitimacy converge. Russia privileges sovereignty and hierarchy, China promotes harmony and connectivity, and Turkey emphasizes kinship and civilizational fraternity. Bassin and Pozo [32] argue that these ideational frameworks transform geopolitics from material rivalry into an ontological contest over the meaning of civilization itself. Central Asian states, however, are not passive recipients of these competing ideologies. As Sim and Aminjonov [12] highlight, Central Asian agency is manifested through multi vector diplomacy and adaptive balancing, whereby states actively shape their autonomy in response to competing geopolitical pressures. This agency enables them to convert great power competition into opportunities for strategic autonomy, making Central Asia a dynamic actor in the construction of Eurasian pluralism.

Three major themes emerge from the reviewed literature. First, civilizational regionalism has replaced traditional balance of power politics as the primary organizing principle in Eurasia. Second, institutional asymmetry defines regional governance, as Russia and China maintain dominance through multilateral structures. Third, ideational competition has become a defining characteristic of the post Western order, as each power advances its own moral geography to legitimize its influence. However, a significant gap remains in the existing literature, as few studies explore the intersubjective interplay among Russian, Chinese, and Turkish civilizational frameworks. The zones of convergence in which these symbolic, infrastructural, and institutional projects overlap remain underexplored, underscoring the need for further research on how such frameworks generate hybrid regional logics.

In sum, the literature portrays Eurasia as a relational and dialogical space rather than a fixed geopolitical zone. Russia constructs it as a realm of sovereignty and cultural hierarchy, China as a network of harmony and connectivity, and Turkey as a community of fraternity and revival. Central Asia stands at the heart of these intersecting visions, functioning as both an object and a producer of order. In this context, Eurasia is reimagined not as the periphery of global politics but as its conceptual epicenter, where the grammar of international order is being rewritten for the twenty first century.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Theoretical Foundations. This study operates within the interdisciplinary framework of critical geopolitics and constructivist international relations theory. It focuses specifically on how ideas, discourse, and civilizational narratives shape the reconfiguration of power in post Cold War Central Asia. Rather than viewing the region as a static "Heartland" defined solely by material control, this paper conceptualizes Central Asia as a constructed strategic space, namely a symbolic field in which

Turkey, Russia, and China project distinct ideational models of order, identity, and authority [33]. These frameworks make it possible to examine the interaction between material strategies, such as infrastructure, security, and institutions, and discursive practices, including civilizational narratives, moral orders, and historical imaginaries, in the making of Eurasian geopolitics.

The research builds on critical geopolitics, which challenges classical and deterministic understandings of space. Instead, it investigates how geopolitical visions are discursively produced by states and elites [33; 34]. Geopolitical reasoning is understood as a performative practice through which actors imagine and justify their place in global hierarchies. Within this framework, discourse functions as both a representational and a constitutive tool that legitimizes state action in foreign policy.

Constructivism complements this perspective by providing a sociological basis for explaining how states' foreign policies reflect shared identities and historically embedded meanings rather than pure rational calculation. Constructivism posits that actors are socialized into specific normative orders, and that these orders shape their preferences and interactions [18; 19; 20]. This approach enables the analysis of pan ideological competition as a process of identity construction and norm diffusion, in which states articulate civilizational frameworks in order to claim moral and strategic legitimacy in a contested regional field.

The concept of civilizational pluralism forms the analytical bridge between critical geopolitics and constructivism. Following Laruelle's interpretation of Eurasianism, Russia constructs a form of civilizational democracy rooted in imperial universality and moral order rather than Western style liberalism [35]. Russian Eurasianism positions the state as the bearer of a unifying civilizational matrix, thereby legitimizing hierarchical pluralism and cultural diversity under centralized authority [36]. This imperial cosmology contrasts with China's Sinocentric developmentalism, which, as Soboleva and Krivokhizh show, relies on pragmatic and sectoral leadership in such areas as infrastructure, security, and resource governance [37]. Such an approach seeks to institutionalize China's regional influence without overtly undermining Russia's role. Turkey, by contrast, deploys a Neo Ottoman and Pan Turkic discursive framework that blends historical and cultural connectivity with soft power activism [38; 39; 40].

Collectively, these ideational projects constitute what Lewis terms "geopolitical imaginaries," namely narratives that redefine sovereignty, moral order, and modernity beyond Western liberal norms. In the context of Central Asia, this produces overlapping and competing visions of legitimacy, including Russia's hierarchical pluralism, China's technocratic developmentalism, and Turkey's civilizational connectivity. Each seeks to normalize its own understanding of order, thereby generating a multidimensional ideological competition that redefines Eurasian geopolitics as a space of symbolic struggle.

Research Design and Methodological Approach. This study employs a comparative discursive analysis across three case dimensions: Russian Eurasianism, Chinese regional initiatives, and Turkish Pan Turkism and Neo Ottomanism. The analysis focuses on both their conceptual articulations and their practical manifestations in Central Asia. The research is structured around three guiding questions: how Russia, China, and Turkey construct Central Asia as a civilizational and strategic space; what ideational mechanisms and narratives underpin their regional strategies; and how these ideational frameworks interact, overlap, or contest one another in institutional and infrastructural practices.

The empirical material includes official documents, elite speeches, and institutional declarations, triangulated with secondary academic analyses. The interpretive method follows critical discourse analysis, identifying the "geopolitical scripts" through which each state reimagines Central Asia [33; 41]. The study adopts a comparative constructivist logic, treating ideational variables, such as civilizational discourse, moral legitimacy, and institutional design, as constitutive mechanisms shaping strategic behavior.

Conceptualizing Strategic Space in Central Asia. The conceptual framework integrates the theoretical logics of critical geopolitics, constructivism, and civilizational analysis in order to explain

how pan ideological competition among Russia, China, and Turkey produces strategic space in Central Asia. It proposes that geopolitical order in the region is constructed through the interaction of discursive, institutional, and infrastructural dimensions, each representing a distinct mechanism of ideational influence.

Critical geopolitics conceptualizes geopolitics as a discursive practice that constructs meanings of space and legitimacy [15; 16; 17; 33; 41]. States are understood as producers of “geopolitical imaginaries,” that is, narratives that define civilization, order, and identity. These imaginaries are not neutral reflections of geography but active instruments of spatial production.

Constructivism provides the social ontology through which these narratives acquire meaning and durability [18; 19; 20]. Strategic action is embedded in socially constructed identities. Political legitimacy and alliance patterns emerge through shared norms and interpretations of history rather than merely through power balancing.

Civilizational analysis frames ideational competition as a moral and ontological process. Competing civilizational projects, including Russian Eurasianism [2; 3; 4; 5; 13; 14; 24; 25; 32; 35], Chinese Sinocentrism [6; 7; 11; 26], and Turkish Pan Turkism [9; 10; 31; 38; 39; 40], each articulate distinct visions of world order. These ideologies transform geography into moral space, where claims to authority are justified through historical continuity, cultural hierarchy, and spiritual mission.

Viewed together, these perspectives establish a relational model in which strategic space emerges from the interaction between civilizational narratives and regional practices. Central Asia therefore functions as a constructed crossroads, namely a geopolitical laboratory in which rival visions of modernity, order, and belonging are tested.

From Ideational Frameworks to Strategic Space. The conceptual model proposed in this study explains how abstract ideational systems are translated into tangible spatial realities in Central Asia. It is built on three interrelated analytical layers, namely ideational, institutional, and infrastructural, as well as five dynamic relational linkages that together articulate the process through which civilizations project power, construct legitimacy, and materialize influence across space. This model advances the argument that strategic space is not a pre existing territorial entity but a relational outcome emerging from the interaction of discourse, institutions, and infrastructure.

At the ideational layer, space is produced discursively through civilizational narratives that define the moral and symbolic boundaries of Eurasia. Russia’s concept of “Greater Eurasia” envisions the region as a unified civilizational continuum structured through hierarchical harmony, with Moscow serving as its historical and spiritual core [4; 35; 42]. This Eurasianist vision situates Russia as the guardian of civilizational plurality, opposing Western universalism and asserting a moral order rooted in geographic destiny.

China’s ideational framework centers on the “Community of Common Destiny,” which advances harmony through economic and infrastructural connectivity [26; 43]. Rather than imposing a single ideological model, this concept projects China as the architect of a moral cosmology based on interdependence, reciprocity, and shared prosperity. Connectivity thus becomes both a physical and an ethical medium of order making [44].

Turkey’s “Turkic World” ideal articulates a distinct civilizational ontology centered on fraternity and cultural kinship among Turkic speaking nations. Anchored in Pan Turkic and Neo Ottoman revivalism, Ankara reimagines Eurasia as a cultural sphere linked by language, history, and shared memory, positioning itself as a moral and historical mediator between East and West [38; 39; 40].

These narratives constitute the ideational foundation of strategic space. Each establishes a symbolic geography that translates historical imagination into political legitimacy, generating moral topographies that precede and inform institutional and material configurations.

The institutional layer operationalizes these narratives by embedding them within formal structures of regional cooperation, governance, and diplomacy. Russia’s ideological claims find expression in institutions such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which function as mechanisms for consolidating influence while preserving the appearance of multilateralism [22]. Through these frameworks, Moscow exercises what has been

described as cooperative hegemony, maintaining regional authority by combining institutional control with normative inclusion.

China's ideational discourse is similarly institutionalized through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the extensive network of Belt and Road Initiative corridors [11; 37; 44; 45]. These structures transform China's vision of moral connectivity into concrete practices of governance and integration, translating the rhetoric of partnership and harmony into a framework of infrastructural and financial interdependence [46; 47].

Turkey, by contrast, institutionalizes its civilizational vision through soft power networks such as the Organization of Turkic States and a range of cultural and educational diplomacy programs [38; 39; 40; 48]. Through these initiatives, Ankara extends its ideological influence without overtly challenging the regional balance, framing itself as a cultural facilitator rather than a geopolitical rival [9; 10; 40].

The infrastructural layer represents the materialization of ideational and institutional designs in physical, economic, and communicative systems. Infrastructure in this context is not merely functional; it is a form of spatial inscription that transforms ideology into practice. The Belt and Road Initiative exemplifies this process through its extensive network of railway corridors, energy pipelines, and digital communication routes that physically embody China's doctrine of connected harmony. Russia's energy pipelines, transport systems, and military bases similarly extend its geopolitical reach, sustaining its identity as the principal guarantor of Eurasian stability.

Turkey's infrastructural projection, although less extensive, is manifested in the proliferation of Turkish language media platforms, cultural centers, and educational institutions that materialize its Pan Turkic vision in symbolic and communicative space (Yavuz, 2020; Yavuz, 2023). This includes projects advanced by entities such as the Turkish Maarif Foundation and the Diyanet, as well as the popularity of Turkish television series, which function as tools of cultural diplomacy and nation branding [49]. Through these material and semiotic structures, ideational systems acquire spatial presence, transforming abstract civilizational imaginaries into embodied infrastructural realities.

The interaction among these three layers generates a series of relational processes that explain how ideational frameworks are continuously translated into strategic space. These processes are dynamic and recursive, underscoring the interdependence of discourse, institution, and infrastructure.

The first linkage, discursive translation, refers to the transformation of philosophical or civilizational ideas into political narratives and strategic slogans. This process enables ideological visions to circulate beyond intellectual elites and enter the domain of policy and public diplomacy.

The second linkage, institutional diffusion, captures the embedding of ideational values within multilateral organizations, treaties, and policy regimes. Through this mechanism, abstract norms of unity, harmony, or fraternity become codified in bureaucratic routines and regional practices of cooperation.

The third linkage, infrastructural embedding, involves the translation of symbolic authority into physical and economic systems. Pipelines, transport corridors, and digital networks function as tangible manifestations of ideological power, converting metaphors of connectivity or solidarity into spatial facts.

The fourth linkage, strategic negotiation, refers to the agency of Central Asian states as they navigate among competing projects. Through practices of balancing, hedging, and selective adaptation, regional actors actively shape the evolving strategic space rather than passively inhabiting it [12]. These strategies of relational sovereignty allow small and middle powers to maintain autonomy amid overlapping spheres of influence [50].

The fifth linkage, spatial reproduction, denotes the ongoing renegotiation of Central Asia's identity as both a civilizational crossroads and a strategic hub. Through continuous interaction among competing narratives, institutions, and infrastructures, the region's spatial meaning is reproduced, contested, and redefined.

Collectively, these five relational processes explain how ideational architectures are instantiated in space through feedback loops that connect discourse, organization, and materiality. The result is a

multidimensional strategic space, namely a complex and pluralistic order in which civilizational ideologies are not merely expressed but spatially enacted.

In sum, this model demonstrates that Eurasia's geopolitical transformation cannot be understood in isolation from the ideational frameworks that animate it. Strategic space is the cumulative product of ideational construction, institutional embodiment, and infrastructural realization, mediated by constant negotiation and reproduction. It therefore provides a theoretical bridge between critical geopolitics and civilizational analysis, illuminating how ideas, institutions, and infrastructures together produce the moral and spatial architecture of Eurasian order..

RESULTS

Russia's Neo Eurasianism and the Reassertion of Civilizational Space. Russian Eurasianism, significantly revived since the 1990s, situates Russia as the civilizational bridge between Europe and Asia. Rooted in the work of early twentieth century émigré thinkers such as Trubetskoy, Savitsky, and Vernadsky, classical Eurasianism conceived of Russia not merely as part of the West but as a unique cultural organism uniting Slavic and Turkic Mongol heritages. The modern variant, termed Neo Eurasianism, rearticulates this philosophical geography into an instrument of regional integration and great power assertion, seeking to restore Russia's moral and geopolitical centrality [2; 3; 51].

As Laruelle and Bassin note, the post Soviet form of Eurasianism is both geopolitical and ideological [4]. It legitimizes Russia's regional preeminence by naturalizing a shared "Eurasian" identity, opposing Western liberal universalism, and invoking cultural relativism as a political principle. Within this narrative, integration projects such as the Eurasian Economic Union are framed not merely as functional institutions but as manifestations of a deeper civilizational unity [13]. Lewis interprets "Greater Eurasia" as a flexible spatial imaginary that recenters Russia's strategic orientation toward the post Soviet space and China while countering Western normative influence [52]. This concept emphasizes a post liberal continental vision anchored in multipolarity, aligning with Russia's ambition to play a greater role in shaping a new global order.

The EAEU, together with the Collective Security Treaty Organization, forms the institutional skeleton of Russia's civilizational project, designed to facilitate economic and security cooperation among member states [22]. Yet, as Cooley and Heathershaw argue, these frameworks often function less as supranational integration mechanisms than as extensions of Russia's bilateral patronage networks, thereby reinforcing a hierarchical structure [53]. The reliance on rent based political economies and elite linkages limits the EAEU's transformative potential, turning it into a "hierarchical assemblage" rather than an autonomous regional order.

Russian Eurasianism also struggles with ideational hybridity and internal contradictions. Although Moscow rhetorically promotes pluralism and sovereignty within the broader Eurasian space, its actions often reproduce neo imperial hierarchies, revealing tensions between proclaimed discourse and practical foreign policy [36]. The discourse of a "common Eurasian destiny" frequently clashes with the reality of Central Asian multi vector diplomacy, in which states actively hedge against Russian dominance through diversified partnerships with external actors [12; 50]. The conflict in Ukraine, for example, has further exposed the limits of Russian influence and the cautious approach of Central Asian states toward aligning too closely with Moscow. This strategic maneuvering underscores the agency of Central Asian states in navigating great power competition rather than merely acting as passive recipients [54; 55].

China's Sinocentric Developmentalism and Connectivity as Power. China's Silk Road Economic Belt, launched in 2013, represents the most coherent Sinocentric vision of regional order since the Tang dynasty. As Jeffrey Reeves shows, the SREB functions less as an economic novelty than as a meta framework, namely an organizing concept that consolidates existing bilateral and multilateral engagements under a unified strategic narrative [26]. Its central purpose is to multiply influence by transforming fragmented cooperation into a relational network that reflects Chinese priorities.

Rather than functioning as a purely economic mechanism, the SREB represents a form of relational power through which China constructs mutual dependence by linking development,

infrastructure, and governance norms. This aligns with China's broader Community of Common Destiny doctrine, which articulates a vision of global connectivity based on shared prosperity and political non interference and is often presented as an alternative to Western models of development [44]. Within Central Asia, this discourse of harmonious development and shared destiny competes with both Western conditionality and Russian paternalism, offering a model of engagement centered on economic ties rather than security alliances. China's economic diplomacy and infrastructure investments therefore embody a moral geography in which harmony and shared development are presented as substitutes for hegemony.

Central Asian responses to Chinese engagement have been complex and strategic. According to Sim and Aminjonov, states such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan practice hedging by simultaneously deepening economic cooperation with China while reinforcing security and cultural ties with Russia and the West [12]. This multi vector diplomacy reflects an acute awareness of China's economic magnetism, the risks of overdependence, and the need to balance multiple external influences [50; 56]. Hedging, in this sense, becomes an expression of agency, enabling states to navigate asymmetry through diversification and selective engagement.

Reeves further notes that Beijing's relational strategy creates what may be described as networked influence. Rather than relying on overt domination, China embeds itself in Central Asian governance, development, and elite networks through initiatives such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Belt and Road corridors [45]. This subtle form of hegemony produces path dependence, as infrastructure projects, soft loans, and educational exchanges generate future expectations of cooperation that can constrain the region's strategic autonomy. At the same time, the ideological appeal of China's model remains limited. As Laruelle and Cooley observe, Central Asian societies remain cautious toward Sinocentric narratives of destiny and generally prefer to frame engagement in pragmatic developmental and economic terms rather than through full ideological alignment [12].

Turkey's Pan Turkic and Neo Ottoman Imaginaries and the Politics of Civilizational Soft Power. Turkey's engagement in Central Asia combines civilizational romanticism with pragmatic economic diplomacy [1; 29]. Anita Sengupta demonstrates that the 1990s witnessed the rebirth of Pan Turkism as an emotive discourse linking Anatolia with the "outside Turks" of Central Asia. This initial wave of Pan Turkism, rooted in shared linguistic and cultural heritage, sought to reconnect the newly independent Turkic republics with Turkey after the collapse of the Soviet Union [57]. However, Turkish elites quickly recognized that an overtly romantic and ideological Pan Turkism was unsustainable because of limited economic resources and geopolitical realities. As Sengupta and Erşen note, Ankara's policy shifted from ideological pan nationalism to a more pragmatic form of Turkism, emphasizing cultural unity and mutual development rather than political union. Presidents Süleyman Demirel and later Abdullah Gül reframed this orientation as one of "rational cooperation," presenting Turkey as a cultural bridge and development partner rather than a hegemonic force [40; 57]. This strategic adaptation enabled Turkey to preserve influence while navigating complex regional dynamics and the presence of other major powers.

By the early 2000s, under the Justice and Development Party, Turkish foreign policy had incorporated a more complex ideological combination of Neo Ottomanism and a distinct form of Eurasianism [8; 9]. As Sengupta explains, Neo Ottomanism reinterpreted Ottoman pluralism and Islamic cosmopolitanism as important sources of Turkey's soft power, projecting Turkey as a moral and cultural center within a broader Muslim Turkic civilization [57]. This approach sought to expand Turkish influence not through military or economic coercion but through cultural familiarity, educational initiatives, media outreach, and religious networks [30].

Institutions such as the Organization of Turkic States, which evolved from earlier Turkic cooperation efforts dating back to 1992, actively promote collaboration among Turkic speaking countries across security, economic, and cultural domains. Similarly, the Yunus Emre Institutes and Turkey's educational outreach programs, including those conducted through the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, represent the institutionalization of this soft power strategy by

fostering cultural exchange and academic ties [30]. Although limited in material resources when compared with China and Russia, Turkey's ideational advantage lies in its capacity to mobilize shared Turkic languages, Islamic heritage, and narratives of mutual kinship, thereby generating symbolic legitimacy and deeper social connections across Central Asia [40]. The OTS, in particular, holds significant potential to exercise strategic, economic, and cultural influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, provided that unity among its members is sustained and that it remains capable of competing with rival regional frameworks [58].

Despite this cultural resonance and soft power projection, Turkish influence in Central Asia remains constrained by structural and geopolitical realities. Russia's entrenched security dominance, particularly through institutions such as the CSTO, and China's extensive financial leverage through the Belt and Road Initiative limit Ankara's ability to define regional norms unilaterally or establish a preeminent position [50; 56]. Ankara's attempts to expand its influence, such as through the promotion of the Middle Corridor as an alternative trade route, can also generate tensions with Moscow, which continues to view Central Asia as its natural sphere of influence [8].

Moreover, Turkey's domestic political oscillations, internal economic instability, and broader foreign policy challenges, particularly in the Middle East, frequently undermine its consistency and capacity as a reliable regional actor [31]. As Sengupta observes, the initial "era of romantic embracing" has given way to one of pragmatic selectivity, in which Turkey prioritizes specific bilateral partnerships, especially with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and concentrates on niche sectors such as education, construction, and defense cooperation [1]. This pragmatic orientation reflects an acknowledgment of the limits of Turkish power projection and the need to operate within the geopolitical constraints of a region dominated by larger powers.

Comparative Dimensions of Civilizational Narratives, Modalities of Power, and Spatial Logics. The three external powers examined in this study, namely Russia, China, and Turkey, each deploy a distinct civilizational narrative to legitimize their engagement and project their respective visions of regional order in Central Asia. These narratives are not merely descriptive. They are performative, actively shaping interpretations of history and imaginings of future geopolitical configurations.

Russia's Eurasianism invokes imperial geography and a distinctive Orthodox Slavic Turkic synthesis in order to frame Eurasia as a "third way" beyond Western universalism [4; 35]. This narrative posits Russia as a distinct civilization with a special historical mission, emphasizing organic unity and a rejection of Western developmental models. It claims civilizational continuity and positions Russia as the natural leader of a historically integrated space in which cultural diversity is preserved under centralized authority.

China's Silk Road Economic Belt and Community of Common Destiny reimagine the ancient Silk Road as a transhistorical narrative of harmony and interdependence. This vision positions China as the central node in a network of shared prosperity, advocating a future oriented developmental modernity in which connectivity and mutual benefit are paramount. It emphasizes economic integration and infrastructure development as instruments for building a Community of Common Destiny, presenting a model of relational power and networked influence that privileges pragmatic cooperation over ideological alignment.

Turkey's Neo Ottoman and Pan Turkic imaginaries revive the historical memory of Ottoman cosmopolitanism and Turkic solidarity in order to reassert moral leadership within a broader Turkic Islamic world. This narrative combines past grandeur with modern Islamic pluralism, emphasizing shared cultural and religious heritage as the basis for fraternity and cooperation. Turkey thus presents itself as a natural leader by virtue of these historical and cultural ties, advocating a regional order grounded in kinship and a distinct civilizational identity.

These narratives compete not only over material space but also over the temporal imagination of Central Asia, as each constructs a different trajectory of modernity and order. Russia claims civilizational continuity with a unique imperial past. China projects a future oriented developmental modernity grounded in economic integration. Turkey combines the grandeur of the Ottoman past with

modern Islamic pluralism and Turkic solidarity. This ideational contestation transforms geopolitics into a deeper struggle over the meaning and direction of civilization itself.

The operational modalities of influence also differ substantially among Russia, China, and Turkey, reflecting their distinct strategic cultures and resource endowments. Although each employs a mixture of power forms, their emphases and degrees of effectiveness vary significantly, producing a complex interplay of influence in Central Asia. Russia relies most heavily on hierarchical and security based instruments, including military integration, coercive leverage, and energy dependency. China privileges economic infrastructure, trade, and relational interdependence, while also extending developmental discourse as a form of soft power. Turkey's influence remains more limited in material terms and depends primarily on educational, linguistic, religious, and kinship based networks. Thus, whereas Russia's power is frequently hierarchical and at times coercive, China's is primarily relational and systemic, and Turkey's is largely symbolic and cultural. Yet all three operate within the same normative space, competing to define what it means to belong to Eurasia and thereby shaping the region's geopolitical identity.

The notion of strategic space, as conceptualized in this study, refers to the co production of physical, ideational, and institutional geographies through which powers seek to shape regional order. This involves not only control over territory but also influence over how space is perceived, organized, and used. Russia constructs space primarily through security architectures [14; 25; 28]. China does so through infrastructural corridors. Turkey, by contrast, builds cultural networks. Each spatial practice articulates a different model of sovereignty and connectivity.

Russia's Greater Eurasia envisions a vertical hierarchy centered on Moscow and manifested through institutions such as the CSTO and the EAEU. China's Belt and Road Initiative imagines horizontal connectivity through transnational networks of trade, infrastructure, and digital communication that reorient the region toward China. Turkey's Organization of Turkic States builds culturally cohesive circuits grounded in shared identity, using cultural exchange, education, media, and religious ties to foster symbolic integration. In this sense, Central Asia becomes an intersectional laboratory of competing modernities, namely a region in which great powers enact civilizational politics through the language of cooperation, integration, and cultural exchange, thereby shaping the very fabric of strategic space.

Central Asian Agency and Strategic Hedging. Despite sustained competition among major external powers, Central Asian states are not passive objects of geopolitical maneuvering. The work of Sim and Aminjonov highlights the nuanced ways in which these states actively hedge among competing civilizational projects, employing sophisticated multi vector foreign policies in order to preserve sovereignty and maximize national interests.

Kazakhstan, for instance, engages in a form of heavy hedging, balancing deep economic cooperation with China through the Belt and Road Initiative against continued security alignment with Russia through the CSTO and the EAEU, while also maintaining cultural engagement with Turkey. This strategy enables Kazakhstan to avoid excessive dependence on any single power while deriving benefits from all three.

Uzbekistan's pragmatic hedging is oriented toward internal regime legitimacy and economic diversification, selectively engaging with all three powers in order to foster development and stability without fully entering any one geopolitical orbit.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan often pursue lighter forms of hedging, constrained by greater dependence on Russia and China yet still seeking limited room for maneuver and diversification where possible. Although these states are more economically and strategically vulnerable, they nonetheless attempt to preserve a measure of autonomy through calibrated diplomatic engagement.

This agency is rooted in a regional tradition of multi vector diplomacy, a foreign policy doctrine institutionalized since the 1990s that allows Central Asian states to pursue contradictory alignments without clearly bandwagoning or balancing. As Silvius argues, these oscillations demonstrate the reflexive awareness of Central Asian elites toward the symbolic economy of power. This strategic flexibility enables them to mitigate risks, extract concessions, and maintain a precarious balance amid

intense external competition. Consequently, although Russia, China, and Turkey compete to shape regional order, it is ultimately the interactional agency and strategic choices of Central Asian states that determine the emergent equilibrium and the evolving character of regional power dynamics.

DISCUSSION

Comparative analysis demonstrates that no single actor possesses the material or ideological capacity to monopolize Central Asia. What emerges instead is a polycentric Eurasia, namely a dynamic field of overlapping sovereignties, economic corridors, and symbolic affiliations. This polycentric order is characterized by a dense web of cooperation and competition in which different powers exercise influence through distinct modalities and spatial strategies.

Russia provides security continuity and a historical sense of order, yet it often lacks the developmental dynamism and economic appeal associated with China. Its influence remains strongest in traditional security sectors and through long standing historical and linguistic ties. China offers large scale infrastructure investment, economic growth, and technological advancement, yet it also generates anxieties concerning debt dependency, sovereignty, and cultural assimilation. Its power is exercised primarily through economic and infrastructural means. Turkey contributes cultural intimacy, linguistic familiarity, and soft power appeal, yet it lacks the material scale and security guarantees associated with either Russia or China. Its influence is strongest in educational and cultural spheres.

These dynamics suggest that Eurasia's future order will be co constructed through a negotiated synthesis of hierarchical, networked, and kinship-based models of regional engagement. This emergent order does not constitute a stable hegemony but rather a dynamic equilibrium in which no single power can unilaterally dictate terms. The construction of strategic space is therefore not a fixed outcome but an ongoing process, continually redefined by ideational interaction, the domestic politics of Central Asian states, and their pragmatic calculations in navigating a multipolar regional environment. The result is a hybrid and fluid regional order in which Central Asian states play an active role in shaping their own trajectories through adaptive diplomacy and strategic flexibility.

Reconstructing Sovereignty and Order through Pan Ideological Competition. The interaction among Russia, China, and Turkey in Central Asia reveals three distinct yet overlapping logics of legitimacy that shape their strategic conduct and civilizational self-understandings. These logics provide the normative foundations for their respective engagements in the region and influence how they define political authority, order, and sovereignty.

Russia's Eurasianist legitimacy draws on the intellectual tradition described by Laruelle and Lewis as a form of civilizational pluralism anchored in state centric universalism [35; 52]. Russian Eurasianism frames sovereignty as an expression of imperial order, namely the state as the moral and historical center of a multiethnic and hierarchical unity rather than as a purely territorial nation state [4; 36]. The Eurasian idea explicitly rejects Western liberal universalism by asserting that genuine pluralism exists between distinct civilizations rather than being confined within states [59]. Karaganov's vision of a "Greater Eurasia" conceptualizes legitimacy in terms of a moral and political equilibrium led by "strong leader democracies" that resist Western hegemony while asserting local traditions as valid foundations of order [35]. This civilizational sovereignty implies that Central Asian regimes, regardless of their internal democratic credentials, are considered legitimate so long as they preserve order and cultural continuity within the broader Eurasian sphere of influence under Russia's perceived leadership [13].

China's Sinocentric developmental legitimacy, by contrast, is grounded in performance-based sovereignty tied to economic growth and social stability. Odgaard shows that Beijing's model of legitimacy in Central Asia rests on effective control and non-interference in domestic affairs, justified by appeals to internationally recognized norms of peace and development rather than through ideological export [11; 44]. China's humanitarian discourse often defends absolute sovereignty, yet it also seeks moral credibility through participation in peacekeeping and global governance initiatives. This model reflects a synthesis of post-Cold War sovereignty principles and human security concerns in which legitimacy flows from a state's capacity to provide livelihoods and prevent disorder [11]. In

Central Asia, this translates into a preference for fostering economic interdependence through Belt and Road corridors that reinforce domestic authority and state capacity without demanding political liberalization [12]. China's strategy thus offers a pragmatic path to legitimacy centered on material benefits and political stability.

Turkey's Neo Ottoman and Pan Turkic legitimacy appeals primarily to cultural kinship and religious solidarity. Yavuz and other scholars emphasize that Ankara's discourse often presents Turkey as a cultural bridge rather than as a hegemon, promoting soft power through education, media, and religious [9; 29]. Unlike Russia's imperial universalism or China's developmental statism, Turkey's legitimacy is symbolic and relational, resting on the revival of historical ties, shared linguistic and cultural heritage, and Islamic cosmopolitanism [1; 10]. Yet, as scholars of Turkish foreign policy note, this form of legitimacy often oscillates between cooperative multilateralism within Turkic institutions and more assertive leadership ambitions in specific contexts, thereby revealing an inherent tension between fraternity and hierarchy in the Turkish vision of a transnational Turkic world [10; 58].

The intersection of these three ideational frameworks has redefined sovereignty in Central Asia, transforming it from a territorially fixed attribute into a more fluid and relational practice of hedging and alignment. Sim and Aminjonov describe this process as heterarchic order building, namely a structure in which multiple great powers exert overlapping yet non-hierarchical influence [53; 56]. Central Asian states actively employ multi vector and hedging strategies to balance competing demands for loyalty while simultaneously extracting economic and security benefits from each external partner [55]. This pragmatic approach to sovereignty enables smaller states to navigate among Russian security guarantees, Chinese economic incentives, and Turkish cultural overtures without fully subordinating themselves to any single external power.

From a constructivist perspective, this dynamic reveals sovereignty as a socially negotiated institution rather than as a juridical constant. Each external power's narrative seeks to define what constitutes legitimate order and, in so doing, transforms the meaning of autonomy for local actors. Russia's discourse of "strategic community" within its near abroad, China's emphasis on "win-win cooperation" [45], and Turkey's appeal to shared civilization [1] all claim to respect sovereignty while simultaneously embedding Central Asian states within broader normative systems. This convergence produces a post Westphalian pluralism in which sovereignty is neither absolute nor entirely surrendered, but is instead continually rearticulated through discourse and practice [17; 33].

Order in Central Asia is therefore no longer imposed by a single hegemon but emerges from the complex and continuous interaction among these civilizational projects. As Agnew and Bassin and his coauthors argue, geopolitical imagination functions as a performative act that maps not only physical territory but also moral geography [2; 34]. In this sense, "Greater Eurasia," "the Belt and Road," and "the Turkic World" are not merely spatial metaphors but competing scripts of political belonging and regional integration. Central Asia serves as their testing ground, where competing claims to moral order intersect and coexist within a dynamic and heterarchic field of influence.

Theoretical Reflection: Strategic Space as a Relational Construct. Drawing on critical geopolitics, the notion of strategic space in this study extends beyond physical geography to encompass the discursive construction of power relations. Ó Tuathail and Dalby conceptualize geopolitics as the practice of writing space, that is, producing difference, inclusion, and exclusion through discourse [15; 16; 17]. Applied to Central Asia, this perspective reveals the region as a relational space continuously produced through the interaction of Russian, Chinese, and Turkish imaginaries. The regional landscape is therefore not simply given; it is actively shaped by competing narratives that define its boundaries, significance, and political possibilities.

Each actor's discourse defines the region's inside and outside differently. For Russia, Central Asia is part of a common Eurasian destiny, namely the interior of an imperial civilizational order [4; 35]. This perspective emphasizes historical continuity, shared cultural heritage, and a natural sphere of influence that legitimizes Moscow's central role in regional security and politics [13]. For China, Central Asia is primarily a periphery of connectivity, namely a critical zone of transit and

modernization essential for domestic stability and economic expansion but not usually framed in terms of ideological incorporation [11; 44]. China's focus lies in integrating the region into wider economic and infrastructural networks, thereby producing interdependence through the Belt and Road Initiative. For Turkey, Central Asia represents a diasporic homeland, namely an external site for the projection of cultural revival and normative kinship. This vision emphasizes shared Turkic identity, language, and culture, positioning Turkey as a cultural reference point and promoter of solidarity through soft power [9; 10].

The relationality of these visions underscores that strategic space is not static territory, but an ideational field constituted through ongoing narrative competition. Central Asian agency lies precisely in exploiting the gaps and overlaps among these narratives. As Sim and Aminjonov note, regional governments hedge strategically by aligning with China's economic resources, Russia's security mechanisms, and Turkey's cultural capital, thereby constructing a hybrid strategic space that is at once dependent on external actors and autonomous in its selective adaptations [12].

This synthesis reflects what critical geopoliticians describe as geo discursive multiplicity, namely a condition in which multiple centers of meaning coexist and prevent any single hegemonic geography from becoming dominant [17]. The concept of strategic space as a relational construct therefore integrates material and symbolic dimensions. Infrastructure corridors intersect with cultural imaginaries, and diplomatic practices coexist with civilizational narratives, together producing a complex and dynamic regional reality.

Civilizational Pluralism and the Challenge to Western Centric Order. A broader implication of this analysis is the gradual erosion of the universalist logic that underpinned the post-Cold War liberal order. The pluralization of legitimacy claims in Eurasia signals what Panarin termed civilizational polycentrism, namely a condition in which multiple normative centers participate in defining global order [35; 59]. Russian Eurasianists interpret this development as the reemergence of a moral multipolarity that explicitly rejects Western teleology and its universalizing claims [14; 25]. China articulates it through the discourse of a community of shared future for mankind, framing pluralism in terms of developmental harmony and economic interdependence rather than ideological confrontation. Turkey's Neo Ottoman discourse similarly advances a vocabulary of inclusive Islamic humanism as an alternative moral language of order grounded in shared cultural and religious values.

Collectively, these ideational projects point to the emergence of civilizational pluralism as a structural principle of contemporary international politics. This pluralism challenges the epistemological dominance of Western international relations theories that assume a single modernity and a universal rationality [2]. Instead, it aligns with post Western approaches that emphasize relational ontologies and multiple modernities. Sovereignty, in this framework, becomes embedded in civilizational systems of value rather than confined to fixed juridical boundaries. The legitimacy of states and their actions is thus increasingly derived from alignment with particular civilizational narratives and normative orders.

This emergent pluralism, however, does not necessarily imply harmony. As the empirical dynamics of Central Asia demonstrate, the coexistence of competing civilizational projects generates friction zones, ranging from normative overlaps in infrastructure governance and security cooperation to discursive struggles over historical narratives and identity. Yet these tensions constitute the very fabric of Eurasian order building. They reveal the gradual transformation of global politics from a unipolar liberal hierarchy into a dialogical, though unstable, system of overlapping legitimacies in which diverse civilizational projects continually interact, adapt, and coexist. This evolving environment challenges conventional understandings of international order and points toward a more complex and multilayered future for global governance.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how the post-Cold War reordering of Central Asia reflects not only a shift in geopolitical balance but also a profound transformation in the ideational architecture of regional order. Through an integrated comparative analysis of Russian Eurasianism, Chinese

Sinocentric developmentalism, and Turkish Pan Turkic and Neo Ottoman revivalism, the research has shown that Eurasian order is shaped not merely by material rivalry but by a pan ideological competition over the moral and symbolic construction of space. Central Asia emerges as the principal arena in which these competing civilizational projects intersect, overlap, and mutually redefine one another, transforming the region into a laboratory of strategic spatiality.

The central argument advanced throughout this paper is that the post-Soviet reordering of Central Asia reflects a shift from territorial geopolitics to discursive geopolitics, that is, from the control of space through coercion to its construction through narrative and legitimacy. Russia, China, and Turkey articulate divergent ontologies of order. Russia seeks moral hierarchy through civilizational unity rooted in its Eurasianist tradition. China advances harmony through connectivity and development, guided by its Sinocentric worldview and the Belt and Road Initiative. Turkey envisions fraternity through cultural and linguistic kinship, drawing on Pan Turkic and Neo Ottoman imaginaries. Each project represents a distinct epistemology of power in which material infrastructure is embedded within civilizational meaning. Eurasia is therefore being shaped not through conquest or unilateral dominance but through contestations over the ideas that define order, sovereignty, and belonging.

By identifying this ideational struggle as a fundamental driver of Eurasian transformation, the study reframes the significance of Central Asia in global politics. Rather than treating the region as a passive periphery subject to great power manipulation, the analysis presents it as a reflexive and creative site of world making, namely a discursive crossroads in which the future of post Western order is negotiated through competing visions of civilization. This reinterpretation foregrounds the agency of Central Asian states and demonstrates their active role in shaping the regional landscape rather than merely reacting to external pressures.

The study's principal conceptual contribution lies in developing a unified model of spatial construction that integrates insights from critical geopolitics, constructivist international relations, and civilizational analysis. Drawing on Ó Tuathail's and Dalby's understanding of space as socially produced through discourse, Agnew's conception of place as relational, and Bassin's and Laruelle's articulation of Eurasia as a moral geography, the article demonstrates that strategic space is both material and ideational. It is continuously constituted through the interaction of three interlinked layers, namely ideational, institutional, and infrastructural, as outlined in the theoretical framework. This layered approach provides a more nuanced understanding of how abstract ideas are translated into tangible geopolitical realities.

This framework advances the literature by showing that geopolitical competition among Russia, China, and Turkey cannot be reduced to zero sum logic or traditional balance of power calculations. Instead, it should be understood as a pluralized process of spatial negotiation in which competing civilizational paradigms generate a polycentric order. The synthesis of critical geopolitics and civilizational theory illuminates how contemporary global politics increasingly operates through overlapping moral spaces rather than singular hierarchies, thereby offering a more suitable theoretical vocabulary for the study of non-Western formations of order. In this respect, the study moves beyond Eurocentric assumptions and offers a broader analytical lens for understanding diverse global power configurations.

Furthermore, by embedding constructivist insights into the analysis of regional practices, the research demonstrates that Central Asian states are active co producers of strategic space. Their multi vector diplomacy and hedging strategies exemplify relational sovereignty, namely a form of agency defined by adaptive engagement rather than rigid alignment. In this way, the study extends constructivist theory beyond its conventional Euro Atlantic focus and demonstrates its relevance to post imperial and polycivilizational settings, while also highlighting the strategic dynamism of actors often perceived as peripheral or weak.

The empirical findings and theoretical synthesis developed in this article carry important implications for both regional policymakers and scholars of international order. The first is the need to reinterpret Central Asia not as a geopolitical periphery but as an ideational crossroads, that is, a

dynamic interface in which competing global narratives converge and transform one another. Viewing the region through this lens enables policymakers to appreciate the complexity of its alignments. Central Asian states are neither mere objects of external domination nor fully autonomous actors detached from external constraints, but rather active mediators within an evolving network of overlapping civilizational systems.

The second implication is that policy engagement with Central Asia must move beyond narrowly materialist frameworks focused only on resources, trade routes, or security alliances. The legitimacy of external influence now depends to a significant degree on discursive resonance, namely the extent to which great power narratives align with local values, histories, and aspirations. Russia's appeal to shared history and security, China's promise of prosperity and development, and Turkey's invocation of cultural fraternity all indicate that durable influence in Eurasia depends as much on narrative alignment as on economic or military leverage.

The third implication concerns the broader global transition toward civilizational pluralism. The rise of these pan ideological projects suggests that the emerging Eurasian order embodies an alternative logic of global governance, one that challenges the universalist assumptions of liberal modernity by recognizing the coexistence of multiple moral and spatial orders. This pluralization does not eliminate conflict. Rather, it institutionalizes competition within a relational framework that replaces singular dominance with negotiated coexistence. For both scholars and practitioners, this development underscores the need for analytical tools better attuned to plurality, hybridity, and relationality in world politics.

This study nevertheless has several limitations. First, although it offers a detailed analysis of ideational competition among Russia, China, and Turkey, its focus on these three powers inevitably narrows the scope of inquiry. Central Asia's geopolitical environment is also shaped by other regional actors, including Iran, India, and Pakistan, as well as by international organizations such as the United Nations. Future research could broaden the analytical field by examining how the ideational frameworks of these additional actors interact with those of the three principal cases explored here.

Second, the study relies predominantly on qualitative methods, including discourse analysis, official documents, and elite speeches. Although this approach yields important interpretive insights, it may benefit from a stronger empirical foundation. Future studies could incorporate interviews, fieldwork, survey data, or quantitative analysis in order to strengthen the evidentiary base of the argument. Such research might also examine how broader publics in Central Asia perceive these competing narratives and how such perceptions shape understandings of national identity, sovereignty, and regional order.

Third, although the study develops a conceptual model organized around ideational, institutional, and infrastructural layers, its empirical application could be expanded further. A more detailed presentation of the coding procedures used in the discourse analysis would improve methodological transparency and facilitate future replication. The limited replicability of the present design may constrain its broader application and comparative use in other regional settings.

In sum, this research contributes to the understanding of ideational competition in Eurasia while also opening new avenues for further inquiry. By extending the analysis to additional actors, incorporating more diverse empirical materials, and refining the methodological framework, future scholarship could provide a more comprehensive account of the emerging patterns of civilizational pluralism and relational sovereignty in Central Asia and beyond.

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CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE U.S. ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Abstract

This article examines the economic diplomacy of the United States, focusing on the various avenues and strategies the country uses to advance its foreign economic interests. Economic diplomacy is a critical component of U.S. foreign policy, enabling the country to influence global economic trends, strengthen international partnerships, and address complex geopolitical issues.

The study examines how the U.S. uses trade agreements, international organizations, and innovative techniques such as sanctions and investment incentives to shape global economic relations. It also emphasizes the link between economic diplomacy and migration, and the importance of foreign investment and human capital in shaping U.S. global strategy.

In addition, the article explores the growing role of innovation in the digital economy, including artificial intelligence and blockchain, which have become an integral part of U.S. economic-diplomatic efforts. By combining traditional diplomatic approaches with modern technology, the U.S. continues to maintain a strong influence on the world stage. The authors anticipate that economic diplomacy will evolve along with global economic trends, and the U.S. will remain a key player in the changing dynamics of international relations in the coming decades.

Key words: U.S. economic diplomacy; geoeconomics; economic statecraft; qualitative content analysis; sanctions policy; technological export controls; great-power competition; digital governance.

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ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ ҚАТЫНАСТАРДАҒЫ АҚШ-ТЫҢ ЭКОНОМИКАЛЫҚ ДИПЛОМАТИЯСЫНЫҢ КЕЙС ТАЛДАУЫ

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақалада АҚШ-тың экономикалық дипломатиясы зерттеледі, оның шетелдік экономикалық мүдделерін ілгерілету мақсатында қолданатын түрлі бағыттары мен стратегияларына баса назар аударылады. Экономикалық дипломатия – АҚШ сыртқы саясатының маңызды